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ABSTRACT

For the past decade there has been a surge of international interest in Japanese education in the wake of its economic and technological successes. This paper discusses eight distinctive features of Japanese education, identifying their advantages and disadvantages and how they have been brought about. These eight features of Japanese schooling include: (1) childhood and adolescence often completely occupied with schooling; (2) privatized development of pre- and post-compulsory education; (3) preference for general education under the single-track system; (4) automatic promotion of classmates by seniority; (5) low enrollment of non-Japanese and adults in schools; (6) high educational achievement with little variation; (7) unique screening function of entrance examinations; and (8) autonomous school management. Japan is likely to experience certain difficulties in correcting the weaknesses and defects in its education system, or in adopting the virtues of foreign education systems. As a rule, foreign practices which are in harmony with Japanese culture, values, or ideas have been more successful in Japan than in their countries of origin. Those practices which are not in harmony have not been successful at all. (61 references) (LAP)

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Introduction

In recent years, intellectuals and political leaders from the industrialized nations have had frequent formal and informal opportunities to exchange views and opinions on the reform of their respective education systems. In this regard, a first priority in discussing strategies for educational reform is to recognize the particular defects or weaknesses within the educational system and how they have been brought about.

Most of the countries concerned have been affected by a number of common problems with regard to their particular public education services. The gravity of these problems, however, varies from country to country. For example, those of Japanese education are considered to be the rigidity of its school system and over-reliance on entrance examinations, while such issues as inequality of educational opportunity, low educational standards, rise in the number of drop-outs, and school violence do not seem to receive such prominence in Japan as in some Western countries.

Clear perceptions of the distinctive features of an educational system will furnish the true key to educational reform. Although there is an urgent need to remedy the defects in Japanese education, reformers should take the utmost care in the process of reform to avoid harming its good aspects. This is important because a given feature may have both a good and bad side making it almost impossible to separate its weakness from its strength. We should be careful, therefore, to examine each feature closely and refrain from harming their good qualities in our efforts to dispose of the bad.

Moreover, the efforts made in studying such features might also provide helpful insights for other countries that intend carrying out educational reforms based on the model of Japan's experience. In fact, for the past decade, there has been a surge of international interest in Japanese education in the wake of its economic and technological successes. As was the case with Japan when it was learning from the West, these countries are likely to experience the same difficulties in emulating its good qualities on the one hand while avoiding certain undesirable effects on the other. Therefore, identifying the main features of Japanese education and clarifying the background and conditions from which they have sprung is the necessary first step toward effective educational reform, but this is a far from easy task.

For one thing, formal education systems in advanced societies are similar in nature to one another, since the prevailing school system is one of the by-products of the establishment of nation-states and their development into industrialized societies. It is natural that developing countries should differ from industrialized ones in their access to schooling and in the breakdown between the public and private sectors. Centralized socialist countries should also differ from decentralized democratic ones in ideas and ideologies underlying formal education. Nevertheless, even societies at entirely different stages of development or with different ideologies have much in common with respect to the structure and function of school systems. They are basically the same, exhibiting only slight differences in the details of educational goals, organization or administrative machinery of the schools, curricula and methodology (Kawanobe, 1981:108-109). In particular, Japan's school system displays extraordinary structural similarities to advanced Western countries. Needless to say, these similarities are ascribed to the historical fact that Japan has learned from their modern school systems and also to their present resemblance in social and political background and

economic and industrial conditions.

Nevertheless, there are distinctions in the traditions and cultures of advanced countries which have caused some dissimilarities in their educational systems. These differences are so firmly rooted in their respective cultures and social structures that it is difficult to analyze them from a comparative perspective. Furthermore, these discrepancies are found more frequently in the running of schools and the relationships among staff members than in the machinery or organization of the schools themselves, and still more frequently in home education or adult education than in school education.

Another obstacle is that distinctions vary according to the country with which comparisons are made. Most of the previous comparative studies undertaken by Japanese researchers have been limited to contrasting advanced Western countries, especially the United States. There is some merit in researching the educational environment of these countries, since they have some distressing features in common with Japan. Japanese researchers should still keep in mind, however, the possibility that different distinctions might be discovered in comparison with the educational systems found in Arab and African countries. The neighboring countries of China, Korea and Taiwan, might also be seen to share some of the educational features which distinguish Japan from Western countries.

At the same time, overseas experts on Japanese education are apt to bring ethnocentric assumptions to their studies. The standards by which they measure Japanese education are determined by the educational systems and cultural values of their own countries. Their bicultural approaches tend to emphasize differences only with their own educational systems. Consequently, the distinctive features of Japanese education they mention are not exactly the same as those which might emerge from a multi-national perspective. For example, school facilities and accommodation in Japan are said to be rudimentary according to American researchers, while they are viewed as excellent by French researchers. Some Europeans criticize Japanese education as excessively regimented, repressive and inhuman, whereas critics from Asia are inclined to refer to negligence in moral education and lack of religious education as defects in Japanese schooling (Kobayashi et al., 1986:4-6, 190).

In order to avoid biased judgement in discussing the distinctive features of Japanese education, I refer in this study as often as possible to the views of overseas experts on Japanese education from a variety of countries and to reliable statistics published by international organizations. The problem is, however, that little information is available on developing countries, and consequently this study is unfortunately unable to make comparisons with them. In this paper, the eight distinctive features of Japanese education will be discussed, identifying what are its advantages and disadvantages and how they have been brought about.

1. Childhood and Adolescence Occupied with Schooling

One of the most distinctive features of Japanese education is that schooling has rapidly spread among the people and carries great weight in the society.

Four years after the Meiji Restoration of 1868, the new government

promptly launched a plan to establish a modern school system based on Western models. The enrollment rate in elementary education reached 90% in 1902 and continued to rise. By 1910, after only forty years under this new school system, Japanese elementary education had achieved near-complete attendance. The number of children going on to secondary education then began to rise, and by 1940 elementary school leavers advancing into some type of secondary school had reached about 25%. The formal education system expanded and developed still faster as a result of the educational reforms immediately after the Second World War and the high economic growth during the 1960s.

Today, almost the whole of the population receives compulsory education (elementary and lower secondary education). Moreover, 95% of teen-agers go on to upper secondary education, 90% of children participate in preschool education at kindergarten or nursery schools, and 38% of school leavers remain in higher education. Thus, regarding access to educational opportunity, Japan ranks high among the advanced societies.

Furthermore, Japanese children spend a greater amount of time at school than children in other societies. Firstly, schools are in operation for as many as 240 days a year at the compulsory education level. The average length of an academic year is 178 days in the United States, 200 days at the primary education level in the United Kingdom, 180 days at the primary and lower secondary education levels and 158 days at the lycee (upper secondary school) in France, 180-200 days in Quebec and 190 days in Mexico. Apart from Japan, therefore, there are very few other instances of schools with such a long academic year. For example, Korean schools are open for educational activities for 220 days a year (Tezuka et al., 1985; Tezuka et al., 1986).

However, the number of instructional days per year at Japanese schools has turned out to be less than in the case of Finland, Italy and Belgium, but greater than in the case of France, the United States and the United Kingdom (Passow et al., 1976:262; Lynn, 1988:115). That is partly because Japanese schools have more event days than in the case of the former three nations. As regards the number of instructional hours per week, Japan is on a par with the average of the various advanced countries previously mentioned. Japanese elementary, lower and upper secondary schools schedule 25 to 29 hours, 30 hours and 34 hours per week, respectively.

Japanese pupils, however, tend to stay in school after lessons, participating in extra-curricular activities or playing sports or games with their schoolmates, and some do not leave until evening. Consequently, the length of time they spend in school is much greater than overseas pupils who leave immediately after their lessons have finished. In addition, Japanese pupils have far more homework to do and the majority of them attend cram schools (juku) or study at home under tutors. In other words, they devote most of their spare time on preparation or revision for their lessons at school. Some schools even occasionally send a few teachers and volunteer parents to patrol the streets to make sure that children do not commit any misdemeanors or indulge in delinquency. Thus, Japanese children and adolescents are still left under the care of school authorities after official school hours and outside the school premises.

Furthermore, school staff are required to remain on duty as usual during the summer vacation, and pupils are also expected to appear two or three times during that period. Nevertheless, schools hardly ever face hostile criticism from parents and other people for their excessive supervision.

On the contrary, they expect the school to play an extensive role and to assume heavy responsibilities. The family or the community occasionally claim that schools do not properly teach correct behavior and good manners or instill morality in their pupils. In my opinion, however, these duties should be the responsibility of the parents rather than schools.

For the past hundred years, Japanese schools have been increasing their pupil and student enrollment to the point that now almost all the children and adolescents are catered for. Accordingly, they have a considerable influence over a wide area of their lives today. The rapid and progressive development of the school system is the result of the vigorous efforts of every Japanese cabinet to catch up with the more advanced Western nations, and of the generous support of the people even at the expense of their personal desires.

Japanese leaders were not long in recognizing the importance of education for national solidarity and economic development. They continually gave a priority to education in spending public resources. The proportion of National Income devoted to education is widely understood to vary in direct proportion to the amount of National Income, but this formula did not apply in the case of Japan. It devoted a great part of its public resources to education in spite of having a relatively low level of National Income for about the first fifty years of the modern school system (Kaser, 1966:119-121). The government has retained this tradition up to the present so that currently only a relatively few advanced countries allocate as much of their public resources on education as Japan.

Although it is true that Japan's current public educational expenditure is rather small in comparison to its Gross National Expenditure, this is partly due to the fact that the public sector does not play as great a role in its national economy as it does in many other advanced countries. Based on the total expenditure, as reflected in the System of National Accounts, Japan's expenditure for the purpose of education accounted for 37% of the government's Final Consumption Expenditure in 1983 (OECD, 1985). Among the OECD members, only Belgium spent as high a percentage of its resources on education as Japan in that year.

In conclusion, one of the main strategies used by the government to catch up with the advanced countries of the West was to make a large investment in education. The people's keen interest in education facilitated that policy.

The above statement does not yet refer to the reasons why schooling has come to cover a large extent of children's and adolescents' lives. One of the reasons for the predominance of schools in children's lives can be found in the fact that Japan's school system preceded other social systems in the process of modernization. In contrast to Japan, the United Kingdom and other European countries experienced changes in social structure first and, then, adjusted the education system to the modernized society (Dore, 1976:15 & 35). Accordingly, Japanese schools have been playing the leading role in conveying knowledge and culture to the people. To a large degree, their ideas and ways of life have been transformed by their experiences at school. Therefore, Japanese parents tend to take it for granted that schools should have a voice in such matters that families or communities in other advanced countries might consider to be their own responsibility.

In addition, the Meiji leaders established schools based on the model of Western private schools for the elite, with little attention to Western public schools for the masses. Western people do not expect their public schools to be total institutions. Instead, they generally assume that responsibility for holistic education rests with parents, and it is only in private elite schools that they expect a wide range of education covering the whole personality of the pupils (Cookson & Persell, 1985:22). Japan borrowed the private school model and ensured that people received holistic education in all schools, both for the elite and for the masses.

Furthermore, schools or companies have come to play a more important role as reference groups in postwar Japan. People used to feel happier to identify themselves with the family, the community and the nation than they are today. As a result of the rejection of nationalism, the dissolution of the community and the increase in nuclear families, children and students are seeking stronger identification with their schools in the same manner as adults are with their companies.

II . Privatized Development of Pre- and Post-compulsory Education

The proportion of pupils and students attending Japanese private (independent) institutions at all levels of education, including kindergarten and university, was 22% in 1987. There are a considerable number of countries where education systems have become more privatized. However, they are either developing countries in which the public sector cannot afford to satisfy people's demand for education, or heterogeneous ones in which there are a multiplicity of religions, languages, races or living standards. With the exception of Japan, no other industrialized and homogeneous societies rely so heavily on the private sector (James & Benjamin, 1988:xvi-xvii).

At elementary and secondary education levels, however, the private sector constitutes only about 7% of the total enrollment in Japan, and so the percentage is not so conspicuous when compared to the 12% in the United States and the 6% in the United Kingdom and former West Germany (Walford, 1989). According to statistics published by Unesco, as of 1982 the average share of the private sector in the total enrollment in primary education was about 20% in advanced countries and about 30% in developing ones.

Some advanced countries surpass Japan in their privatization of primary or secondary education. As high as 71% of primary and secondary school pupils in the Netherlands, 22% of primary school pupils in Australia and 14% of primary school pupils and 20% of secondary school pupils in France were in the private sector in the mid 1980s (Kurian, 1988; Tezuka et al., 1985). The proportion of pupils attending private elementary and lower secondary (compulsory) schools in Japan is about 0.6 percent and 3%, respectively, and smaller than that in the United States and European countries.

Nevertheless, Japanese pupils go to private cram schools for advanced or remedial education. Those taking lessons in the traditional arts or studying under home tutors hired by their parents, amounted to 92% at the lower secondary school level and 78% at the elementary school level in 1985 (Mombusho, 1987:3). Taking advantage of such a flourishing business, some ambitious entrepreneurs have established juku throughout the country in a similar way to chain stores. There are no equivalents to this monstrous juku boom in any other country (Lynn, 1988:103).

Meanwhile, at the higher education level, enrollment in the private sector accounts for approximately 75% of the total. Among advanced countries, in only the Netherlands and Belgium does the private sector rival the public sector in higher education, but in these countries the governments not only support but control private higher education institutions on almost equal terms with their public counterparts (Geiger, 1986). In the United States, the proportion of enrollment in the private sector at higher education level is about one-fourth and greater than at the primary and secondary education level. In contrast, the private sector does not play an important role in higher education in other advanced countries. For example, the proportion amounts to only 4% in France and is minimal in former West Germany and the United Kingdom.

The circumstances in which the private sector has been taking an active part in Japanese education have kept the public sector from monopolizing formal education and stimulated healthy competition between the respective sectors. Forced to compete with each other, the competence of the surviving private schools and universities serves as a reliable standard against which the efficiency of public schools and universities is evaluated.

One of the popular explanations for Japan's abundance of private educational institutions is the 'late development effect'. Dore points out in his book, The Diploma Disease, that the tendency for qualificationism is more deeply entrenched, the later in world history a country's development drive starts (Dore, 1976:x). People in developing countries tend to be more enthusiastic over educational credentials than those in advanced countries because the value of acquired knowledge and technology is more highly prized in the former. Since they are constrained by financial difficulties, their governments are unable to provide sufficient educational opportunities for their people, and consequently private educational institutions develop and come to cover the greater part of the shortfall especially at the post-compulsory education level.

Generally speaking, most universities in European countries which modernized ahead of other societies are maintained by the government and have a long and honorable history, whereas in American and Asian countries, which have fallen behind Europe in modernization, a considerable number of universities are in the private sector and have only a brief history. For example, the private sector contains the majority of universities in a few Latin American countries including Brazil and Columbia (Levy, 1986:2-5) and some of the Asian countries such as the Philippines, Korea, Taiwan and Indonesia (Kitamura et al., 1987:2).

Japan is also included in this group; the private sector constitutes about 72% of universities, 90% of junior colleges, 93% of special training schools and 98% of miscellaneous schools. In addition, 76% of kindergartens are in the private sector. There is very little doubt that the predominance of the private sector at both ends of Japan's educational spectrum is the result of having been a relative late-comer to modernization.

At the same time, however, a government policy of discriminating in favor of compulsory education and against higher education in their allocation of public resources constitutes another important factor in the expansion of private higher education in Japan. In the United States, which used to be in the group of late-comers to modernization, the majority of students attended private universities before the First World War, but a breakdown of

present-day university enrollment between the public and private sectors shows the reverse to be the case in Japan today (Mckeoun & Alexander, 1986:7). The difference in the allocation of public resources to higher education between the two countries accounts in part for this contrast; the proportion of public educational expenditure allotted to higher education is only 10% in Japan but nearly 35% in the United States.

Advanced countries, except Italy, Norway and Japan, devote a considerable amount of their public resources to higher education in comparison to other education levels (OECD, 1986:111-112). Thus, the Japanese government still adheres to a policy favoring compulsory education by giving it the lion's share in its education budget. This has invited privatized expansion in higher education as is often the case with developing countries and the NIES. Moreover, it is in part due to this imbalance in financing that Japanese universities often meet with sharp criticism while its elementary and secondary schools have attained an international reputation (Ichikawa, 1988a:28).

Nevertheless, Japanese private education would never have developed on a mass scale and would remain the monopoly of the privileged classes, without the common people's readiness and ability to invest in schooling. As a result of the relatively equitable distribution of income throughout the period of high economic growth, ordinary households have become able to afford educational expenses without experiencing undue difficulty in making ends meet.

Even when the level of income was low, education was one of the greatest priorities of the Japanese people, and they tended to spare no expense to equip their children with a good education. Even in the 18th century, not only the ruling classes but also the working classes took a pride in their efforts in learning to read (Tsuji, 1988:122-136). As a result, some overseas specialists in Japanese studies have also attributed the remarkable development of private education to Japan's cultural heritage.

In addition, Rohlen doubts whether it is coincidental that cram schools are also regularly found today in Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, which are three more societies with a Confucian past (Rohlen, 1980:242). In most Western countries, governments provide higher education free of charge, or, otherwise, have generous scholarship systems to cover student fees. The number of students would immediately decline if European or American colleges and universities charged higher tuition to their parents (Yuasa, 1988).

Rohlen also says that by American and European standards, the practice of sending children for private tutoring with an eye to university entrance is behavior characteristic of the much narrower upper middle class (Rohlen, 1980:238). In Japan, however, between two-thirds to three-fourths of people identify themselves with 'the middle class' and try to keep up with the Suzukis (Joneses). These behavioral tendencies found in Japanese society have contributed to the success of its educational system, especially in private education.

By the end of the Tokugawa Era (1603-1867), private academies and terakoya (the most wide-spread type of elementary schools for commoners) had become popular among the people, and there were also fief schools established by local feudal lords. As a result, Japan was reasonably competitive in its literacy rate compared with European countries of that time and about 40 to 50% of men and 15% of women were literate (Passin, 1965:276). In addition,

people actively took lessons in the arts in which they were interested. Having inherited these attitudes towards learning and education from their ancestors, the Japanese today spend a considerable part of their household income on both formal and informal education.

III. Preference for General Education under the Single-track System

Under a single-track system, few Japanese schools provide vocational or specialized programs. At the compulsory school level, the proportion of pupils attending private schools remains minimal and almost all the remainder are enrolled in public schools. Applicants for upper secondary education have the option of academic, vocational and specialized programs, but the nature of the curricula does not vary widely with the type of program. Furthermore, every program covers three years, and certificates are issued upon completion which formally, at least, represent equal educational qualifications.

The dualistic, forked or multi-truck structure still lingers on in secondary education in some countries of the world (Kurian, 1988; Tezuka et al., 1985). In former West Germany, primary school leavers are channeled into three kinds of educational institutions, Hauptschule (main school for primarily lower ability ranges), Realschule (intermediate school) and Gymnasium which corresponds to British grammar school (Max-Plank, 1984). France unified almost all its lower secondary education into colleges in 1975 through the reforms carried out by Haby, former Minister for Education, but upper secondary education is split up into several systems which cover varying numbers of years (Harada et al., 1988:108). In British secondary education, the tripartite division into grammar, technical and secondary-modern schools has been abolished in most districts since 1965. The comprehensive school system has replaced these three mutually exclusive schools and has come to enroll 90% of pupils (Graves, 1988:11). Nevertheless, the respective comprehensive schools are using the expedient of 'streaming' which can be defined as the grouping of each year's intake of children into classes according to their general ability. Thus ninety children would be divided into three classes of thirty each: A (above average); B (about average); C (below average). Otherwise, they may make use of another expedient known as 'setting' which can be defined as the regrouping of the classes of a given year into 'sets' of roughly equal ability for a particular subject (Pedley, 1964:214).

In contrast, American primary and secondary education have become renowned as good examples of the single-track system. In the third or fourth grade, however, most children have their first experience of ability grouping within school. By the time they reach the junior high level, the practice of stratifying classes and also within-class grouping has become common (Cummings, 1986:125). The overall proportion of secondary schools employing some sort of tracking is reported to constitute three-quarters (Passow, 1988:219).

At present, a few European countries, including Scandinavia, have totally replaced the dualistic structure with a single structure in their education ladders from primary up to secondary education. Consequently, all the advanced countries except for German-speaking societies have come to provide at least the first stage of secondary education in a type of comprehensive school system (Pluckrose & Wilby, 1979:74).

Meanwhile, Japan's single-track educational system for the compulsory level dates back to 1872 when 'The Education System Order' was proclaimed. Since that time, Japan has maintained the principle of not splitting this level of education into two subsystems for the elite and the masses respectively. Taking into consideration the fact that none of the advanced European countries except for Sweden had abandoned the idea of the dualistic system until the end of the Second World War, it is worth noting that Japan, a late-comer, introduced a single-track system based on the model of the United States in the 19th century.

It is said that the government had originally intended to provide various types of programs and schools for elementary education. The decision to introduce only one occurred in part because the national economy was still underdeveloped in those days. At the same time, children tended to opt for the standard program, and thus public opinion urged the government to establish a system of common elementary schools for all children in 1900 (Sato, 1972).

Subsequently, the task of establishing a comprehensive secondary education system became a central issue, and came to fruition when the government promulgated 'The Secondary School Order' in 1943. The idea underlying the order was that no class distinction should be drawn between general education and vocational education or between schools for boys and schools for girls. The government declared that Japanese secondary education institutions were all equal in status with differences only in curriculum (Sogabe & Sato, 1943:44). Japan's efforts at unifying secondary education had, therefore, already met with success during the War.

Apart from the urgent desire of the government to secure national cohesion, the desire of the people to receive respectable schooling as good as their neighbors promoted the development of a single-track educational system as opposed to the European dualistic system.

Currently, moreover, Japanese schools providing vocational education constitute a very small proportion out of the total number of schools (Cantor, 1989:11-12). All compulsory schools offer general education, and pupils are not given opportunities for vocational training. At the upper secondary education level, academic, vocational and specialized programs are provided, but, in actual fact, the proportion of students taking academic programs has been increasing over the last forty years since the present upper secondary school system was launched, and accounts for nearly three-quarters of the total. Furthermore, in the vocational programs, more than half the total school hours are allotted to non-vocational academic subjects, although regulations laid down by the Ministry of Education stipulate that the absolute minimum of non-vocational or academic subjects in the vocational program should account for one-third of the total school hours.

According to statistics published by Unesco, the proportion of pupils at secondary education level taking academic programs in 1982 was 78% in advanced countries and 88% in developing countries. This ten-percent difference is exaggerated, because the population aged twelve to seventeen remaining in education accounts for 82% in the former and 39% in the latter. As for the percentage of students taking academic programs in secondary education, Japan almost equals developing countries in spite of the exceptionally high enrollment rate of its secondary school age-group.

Japan's preference for general education persists into higher education. University students spend the first two years attending lectures on liberal arts before they concentrate on specific fields. From this perspective, Japanese universities are considered to have been founded on the American model rather than on European models. In addition, postgraduate courses have not yet developed to any great extent, and departments of technology do not provide students with disciplines suitable for developing specialities. The orientation of Japanese higher education conforms to other levels of education in paying little attention to the direct preparation of students for labor markets (Hayes et al., 1984:45).

McCormick states that Japanese school education is remarkably free from the more obvious manifestations of vocationalism as relatively specific skill training which is being pressed on European educational systems (McCormick, 1988:37). On the contrary, apart from the fact that Japan's economic success stems from rich in-company training, Japanese school education focuses unwaveringly on mastering 'foundation'. Dore regards Japan's system as more efficient than its European counterparts, now that technical innovation or industrial restructuring has been accelerating (Dore & Sako, 1989).

IV . Automatic Promotion of Classmates by Seniority

In Japan, during the entire period of formal education from kindergarten to university, those of the same age form a grade. Basically, classmates in elementary and secondary schools proceed automatically to the next grade every year, almost irrespective of their educational achievement, and then leave all together after the prescribed period. Japanese schools neither allow the gifted or fast learners to skip a grade ahead of their classmates nor make remedials or slow learners repeat grades. Furthermore, the ratio of drop-outs remains exceptionally low.

At elementary and lower secondary school level where education is compulsory, Japan has achieved near-complete attendance. Approximately 3% of children attend national public and private schools which are selective, or special schools for the handicapped. All the others are enrolled in local public elementary and lower secondary schools, so that a wide diversity of ability naturally exists among the pupils. Nevertheless, there is no ability grouping by class, and only a few lower secondary schools informally reorganize their seniors into groups based on their progress during their lessons in limited specific subjects such as English and mathematics.

No other country except Korea has such a concurrent annual system of promotion (Okihara, 1981; Kurian, 1988), although the situation is different in the United Kingdom and Scandinavia which have a background of using a fully individualized teaching method. Of especial note, French-speaking countries promote pupils to the following year's class only by rigid selection. For example, nearly 10% of pupils in compulsory education are held back every year in the French five-year primary school and four-year lower secondary school. Only half of them succeed in passing through primary school without any repetition of the program, and it takes seven years or more for 10% of them to complete the five-year course.

In Belgium, grade-repeaters at primary school constitute about 15% in the Dutch-speaking areas and about 35% in the French-speaking areas. In

other countries, promotion in school is not as rigid as in France, but the proportion of grade-repeaters at primary school level amounts to 3 to 4% annually in former West Germany, 2% in the U.S.S.R. and 5% in the United States.

Meanwhile, accelerated promotion for fast learners is not generally prevalent among these countries, but a few particularly gifted pupils are allowed to skip a grade or more in the United States, the U.S.S.R. and former West Germany. In France, moreover, grade-skippers constitute 2 to 3% in the latter half of primary education level and around 5% at secondary education level. Furthermore, Chinese schools occasionally encourage fast-learners to skip two grades at a time.

With regard to Japanese upper secondary education, the enrollment rate has reached 95%. At this post-compulsory education level, entrance examinations for admission to individual schools perform the function of sorting the applicants out. As a result, these schools are ranked hierarchically in terms of the academic ability of their successful applicants. Consequently, educational standards vary among upper secondary schools, whereas their curricula are almost the same throughout the country. Although it is natural for schools at the middle or bottom of the hierarchy to have a considerable number of students whose educational achievement is appreciably below the norm, they are rarely held back, or made to repeat a grade on the basis of their poor marks. The question of drop-outs has recently stimulated some public debate, but the annual ratio of drop-outs is estimated to be about 2%, whereas more than 90% of upper secondary school students manage to complete their programs.

In this respect, Japan differs entirely from other countries, at least Western ones. In the United Kingdom, for example, most children leave school on completion of compulsory education; the proportion of those who remain in secondary education is about 30% at the age of sixteen and 20% at the age of seventeen. In the United States, most compulsory school leavers continue into an upper secondary school under the credit accumulation system, but a quarter of the students drop out, so that less than 75% succeed in completing the high school program. Particularly disturbing are the low completion rates of the Hispanic and colored students; their completion rates in 1983 were about 50% and 59%, respectively.

As in the case of its primary and lower secondary schools, the French lycees (upper secondary schools) expect high standards of their students in their progression from one grade to the next. Nearly 20% of students repeat the last grade, and nearly 10% drop out of school at every grade. Only one-third of entrants into colleges (lower secondary schools) successfully complete the lycee. Meanwhile, in former West Germany where secondary education is based on the forked system, the proportion of repeaters is 2% in the Hauptschule and the comprehensive school, 5% in the Gymnasium, and 6% in the Realschule. Moreover, the Gymnasium transfers students who have been held back for two consecutive years to the Hauptschule which is non-selective, and only half of those who have entered the Gymnasium succeed in obtaining the Abitur, a qualification for going on to university.

In addition, developing countries are also confronted with the problem of drop-outs, though they have different backgrounds from those in advanced countries. For example, the pupils or students who manage to finish school in China constitute only about 60% at every school level from primary to upper secondary education (Tezuka, et al., 1986).

At the higher education level, most Japanese universities also tend to promote students by seniority, not by merit. Having been screened twice, through admission to upper secondary schools and universities, those students attending university show little disparity in terms of ability. A high graduation rate can again be regarded as characteristic at this education level. At the end of the fourth year, nearly 80% of undergraduates obtain a first degree without repetition of a grade and about 90% of them manage to graduate within a period of eight years.

V . Low Enrollment of Non-Japanese and Adults in Schools

Japanese formal education caters only to Japanese children, adolescents and youth. The group of pupils or students in a class is exceptionally homogeneous in both cultural background and physical and mental development. In contrast, heterogeneous learners are enrolled in schools in most other countries.

Only a few adults attend upper secondary schools in Japan, where progression from one grade to the next depends mostly upon the calendar. There used to be a number of adults taking evening courses or correspondence courses at upper secondary schools or studying at lower secondary night schools, but the numbers have been declining as the enrollment rate in full-time courses has been rising. Most students attending junior colleges and colleges of technology, and most of the first and second year university students are in their late teens. The number of postgraduate students is relatively small in spite of the spread of higher education, and mature students participating in recurrent education are a minority in Japanese universities.

The law stipulates that people reach adulthood at the age of twenty, and therefore every student in the latter two years of university legally assumes adult rights and responsibilities. Nevertheless, people tend to regard university students (gakusei) in their early twenties as not full-fledged adults. They also treat upper secondary school students as well as lower secondary ones legally and attitudinally as children (kodomo).

In short, the Japanese believe that schools and universities are no place for adults who have occupied a position in society (shakaijin), no matter how lowly their positions might be. Conversely, in Western societies, upper secondary schools and even lower secondary schools, as well as universities, are accessible to adults. They used to cater almost exclusively to young applicants but the rise in uneducated immigrants and the spread of recurrent education have changed the situation.

According to an OECD study of the mid 1980s, the proportion of successful candidates for higher education institutions aged twenty-five and over is highest in Sweden with 55%, followed by 32% in Australia, 24% in the United States, 20% in Finland, 17% in the United Kingdom, 10% in Canada, 9% in France and former West Germany and 5% in Austria (CERI, 1987:31-33). The figure for Japan is not available, but the Ministry of Education roughly estimates that only about ten thousand people annually enter universities more than three years after their completion of secondary school courses (Mombusho, 1988:39). Therefore, the proportion of students in their late twenties or older remains at only about 2%.

Although lifelong learning has been advocated by the government for a number of years now, recurrent education has developed only marginally while non-vocational adult education for life-enhancement and leisure, which characterizes the nature of lifelong education in Japan, has been prevalent. That is partly because higher education institutions persist in having a rigid and inflexible admission system and partly because the government has not taken effective measures to smooth away difficulties that a mature student might face while participating in recurrent education. It is, however, mainly due to the lifelong employment system under which most employees are promoted by seniority, and also because of social practices which pressure people into acting in a certain way in accordance with their age (Ichikawa, 1987).

In the meantime, the number of non-Japanese pupils and students still remains minimal at Japanese schools and universities. The Ministry of Education reported in its Basic School Survey that 33,669 non-Japanese students were enrolled in higher education institutions in 1989 and that they constituted only 1.30% of the total. Those who were enrolled in pre-primary, elementary and secondary schools and in special schools for the handicapped amounted to 90,246 and accounted for 0.40% of the total in the same year. This means that the proportion of non-Japanese was only about 0.49% throughout all levels of formal education (Mombusho, 1990a).

In other advanced countries, foreign students form a far greater proportion. According to the Ministry of Education, the proportion of foreign students enrolled in higher education was 10.3% in France, 9.7% in the United Kingdom, 6.1% in former West Germany and 5.0% in the United States in the mid 1980s (Mombusho, 1990b).

In addition, the admission of immigrant children of school-age has created serious problems in advanced countries. In Belgium, for example, immigrant primary school children constitute an average of 14% of the total enrollment throughout the country, and from one-fourth to one-third in metropolitan areas. In former West Germany, the proportion of children aged from six to ten whose parents are from other countries reached 15% in 1981. Especially in the Ruhr, foreign children constituted more than three quarters of the total enrollment in a number of primary schools. It is said that teaching a class tends to become almost impossible when the proportion of foreign children exceeds one-third (Max-Plank, 1984).

Japan has so far retained a closed educational system for people from other societies in comparison with other advanced countries. The number of overseas students studying in Japanese higher education institutions, however, quadrupled from about 7,000 to about 31,000 in the eight-year period from 1981 to 1989 (Mombusho, 1990b:7) in keeping with the rise in internationalization. Furthermore, the number of workers from overseas has been rapidly increasing in recent years. Therefore, it is within the bounds of possibility that Japan may experience problems concerning multi-cultural education for these workers' children in the future.

VI . High Educational Achievement with Little Variation

One of the triumphs of Japan's educational system which is often referred to is that schools, especially those at the compulsory education level, maintain high intellectual standards for the great majority of

children. Most overseas specialists in Japanese education mention the results of the tests conducted by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) as evidence for their complimentary attitude.

The international surveys of educational achievement in mathematics and science, conducted by the IEA in 1964 and in 1970 respectively, demonstrate that scores gained by Japanese students were exceptionally high among the advanced societies and that the coefficient of variation in Japanese scores was exceptionally low (Cummings, 1980:160). Based on further data testifying to the success of Japanese education, Lynn, an Irish psychologist, concludes that Japanese teen-agers are three years ahead of their Western counterparts in terms of their educational attainments in mathematics and science (Lynn, 1988:17).

Some social indices such as the high accountability and productivity of the labor force, the low crime rate and long life expectancy are also referred to as evidence showing how the Japanese school system has succeeded in socializing children into hard-working, well-disciplined and healthy adults (Duke, 1986).

No attempt, however, has yet been made to measure how much school education has contributed to the country's prosperity. Whether or not the results of the IEA surveys are reliable for international comparisons, Japanese children may have accomplished their admirable achievements by studying in cram schools or with the assistance of private home tutors outside the formal school system. Moreover, the industrious and cooperative character of the Japanese may originate in their native culture and ethnic homogeneity, or in discipline at home or through in-company and factory training, rather than in their school experience.

Furthermore, as a result of their social homogeneity, the Japanese are comparatively free from such misfortunes as extreme poverty, serious unemployment, high divorce rate, or ethnic tensions. Since pre-modern times, they have appreciated the value of learning and shown respect for teachers, and parents have, therefore, been willing to lend their support to the schools (Ichikawa, 1988b), for example, by taking part in parent-teacher association activities.

Even though the Japanese school system has particularly been favored by the social milieu, to examine why it has been so fruitful might be of great interest. I have found that the following views prevail among overseas researchers (Ichikawa, 1986: 248):

a) Japanese schools offer demanding and balanced curricula, in comparison with its counterparts of the United States and a number of other countries where secondary education is as widely dispersed among the population as is the case in Japan. It is true that the attainment goals for academic subjects are not as high as in European secondary schools for the elite, but the curricula include arts, physical education, and moral education as well as basic subjects, with the aim of developing a positive balance of intelligence, emotional stability, and physical health in children. In addition, as mentioned earlier, students follow such curricula for a longer academic year.

b) Teachers dedicate themselves to their work and undertake in-

terminable tasks including extracurricular guidance activities. They also try to treat all pupils impartially and refrain from favoring gifted children. They have won the respect of the public and enjoy high social status, secure positions, and good salaries. The average salary of public school teachers was more than 10% higher than that of other local civil servants in 1988. Moreover, their professional independence and strong voice in the running of schools have contributed to a feeling of pride in their work.

c) Differences in learning conditions vary minimally from one geographic area to another. School curricula, educational facilities and equipment, textbooks, teacher qualifications and salaries and public expenditure per pupil are almost the same throughout Japan. As Japan is a single-state nation like France, and unlike the United States or Germany which are federations, standards of curricula and facilities are determined by the central government. Thus, local governments are granted allocations so that they may have almost equal finances, and public elementary and secondary schools are administered substantially by the prefectures rather than by municipalities. These factors help to maintain educational uniformity.

d) Most Japanese pupils are cooperative and well-disciplined, and studious. Therefore, teachers need not spend an inordinate amount of energy on maintaining order and can concentrate, instead, on giving well-prepared lessons. Assistance from elected class officers and daily rotating monitors promotes efficiency in running the classrooms.

Although Japanese schools, especially in the public sector, are, therefore, oriented towards extreme egalitarianism, the idea of meritocracy has not been completely eradicated from people's minds. On the one hand, educational authorities as well as teachers' unions persist in pursuing an official policy of equality, and public opinion and views expressed through the mass media also support their posture. On the other hand, however, most parents personally desire an education that is tailor-made for their respective children. Accordingly, they have come to expect that quality private schools or cram schools can assist in developing the ability and aptitude of their individual children.

In Japanese education, therefore, both public and private sectors have been playing their respective roles with the former taking an egalitarian approach following the official policy line, and the latter taking a meritocratic approach in response to individual demand. These two differently-oriented sectors may, thereby, be seen to complement each other. The private sector exists by providing an educational service that the other sector neglects, which in turn allows the public sector to devote its efforts to the pursuit of equality (Rohlen, 1980).

Their healthy rivalry has contributed to the remarkable achievement of minimal variation in Japanese education. It should also be noted that French public and private sectors have recently been performing similar functions to their respective Japanese counterparts (Teese, 1989:141-148).

VII. Unique Screening Function of Entrance Examinations

In Japan, there is no general certificate equivalent to the Abitur or Baccalaureate. Applicants for upper secondary schools or higher education institutions gain admission after taking a selective entrance examination coupled with a written achievement test. As most of the pupils and students are promoted almost automatically every year as long as they are enrolled in the same school, they are only sorted out during the transition periods from one educational level to the next.

Both at home and abroad, harsh criticism has been directed at this screening mechanism on the grounds that it has caused overheated competition and hindered the potential for diversification in Japanese education. Competition for admission to higher levels of education, however, is not as severe as it is rumored to be. Upper secondary schools have places for all applicants and even junior colleges for almost all applicants, half of whom are admitted only through recommendation by their respective secondary schools. Moreover, about 90% of fresh applicants would be enrolled in the universities, if it were not for the ronin (school leavers who have failed the university entrance examinations at their first attempt). There is no basic shortage of opportunities in Japanese post-compulsory education. Certainly, the situation is totally different from the one in China where the total enrollment of higher education institutions was estimated to be about one-fourth of the number of applicants in 1984 (Otsuka, 1986:626).

Although it is true that some prestigious universities and reputable schools are extremely selective in common with schools for the elite in other societies (Amano et al., 1981), most of these Japanese institutions do not impose particularly difficult entrance examinations on their applicants. Their European counterparts appear to impose more demanding written papers including weightier subjects such as Latin or philosophy (Nakajima, 1986). It is reported that the higher level curricula for the International Baccalaureate correspond to those used for the first two years of a Japanese university (Tokumaru et al., 1983; Tokumaru, 1984). An experiment has revealed that Japanese university students were devastated by some of the questions in those papers (Sawada, 1983).

Taking a broad view, therefore, Japan does not resemble an examination hell any more than an examinees' paradise. On the contrary, Japan may be more reasonably considered to have applied lighter screening for people than other societies, thanks to the limited difference in family income as is the case in Sweden (Sawywer, 1976) and the lack of any apparent class distinction.

An objection might be raised that the Japanese people are still intent on gaining better educational qualifications so that they can have an edge over others who match them in every other respect. However, looking at it from a different angle, the fact that the majority of people can afford to enter the competition for higher educational qualifications would suggest that democracy has overcome class consciousness in Japan. Consequently, the annual entrance examinations provoke great interest among the population. Furthermore, the sharpness of competition does not necessarily increase in direct proportion, but may often occur in inverse proportion to the number of candidates.

What, then, has conveyed the false impression that there is cut-throat competition? Why do some students submit themselves to rigorous coaching for

examinations? People tend to believe that entrance examinations mechanically sort out winners and losers without hesitation or reserve, and deprive the great majority of losers of a second chance. The system seems to have a severe impact on students, because they consider the examinations for admission to universities as an initial and final screening of human resources. They would not become so feverish about preparing for university entrance examinations, if their elementary schools held back some pupils every year as French ones do (Homma, 1985), if their school system sorted them out at the age of ten under the forked structure as the German system does, or if they anticipated having keen competition after entering university as their French and American counterparts do.

Furthermore, constant discord or tension does not occur between the students within a group under the Japanese system where screening or selection of human resources almost always takes place in accordance with the progressive stages in their school career. A winner in the competition gains a place in a new group and once there, he and his classmates or colleagues tend to act in harmony rather than competitively within their group (White, 1987:76).

Therefore, those students who are not in a transition stage are relieved of sharp competition. Some overseas researchers have mentioned that Japanese kindergartens and elementary schools are a paradise free from such harshness (Lewis, 1984), and some have referred to Japanese universities cynically as another paradise (Zeugner, 1984). Missing the fact that the Japanese educational ladder alternates tension with relief, most other overseas scholars hold a superficial view that Japan's examination system puts pressure on children and adolescents to work hard during the entire schooling period.

Another point that should be mentioned is that success or failure in the Japanese university entrance examinations rarely depends upon reports from the applicants' former schools on their scholarly achievement and extracurricular activities, the results of an aptitude test, or such attributes as personality and family background, but mainly upon the scores gained in a written achievement test. In Greece and Portugal, unlike most of the other European countries, admission to universities is based upon an entrance examination. In these two exceptional countries, a considerable number of unsuccessful applicants spend a year or more attending coaching schools, and there is a great demand for private tutors (Amano et al., 1981). Japan's neighbors, Korea and Taiwan, have also been experiencing a similar situation.

In the meantime, no entrance examination takes place in those societies where admission to higher education institutions depends on a graduation certificate for secondary education or on an achievement report from secondary schools. The system of Baccalaureate in France, Abitur in former West Germany, or GCE in the United Kingdom performs the function of allowing the holders to go on to higher education. Although some American universities conduct entrance examinations, student selection is governed by Grade Point Averages (GPAs) in high school transcripts and results of the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). As a result, students have little incentive to prepare hard for written achievement tests.

In contrast to this, Japanese people prefer competition between students from different upper secondary schools to that between classmates within a school. Accordingly, Japanese universities place little emphasis on

transcripts and recommendations from upper secondary schools, apart from any doubts they might have concerning their reliability. Furthermore, the great majority of Japanese are in favor of achievement tests and against aptitude tests, since they believe that examinees should be rewarded for their efforts and not for their inherent ability.

In addition, the Japanese tend to think that selection by written test scores avoids prejudice or bias held by examiners or inequalities based on family background. Universities in the United States are more apt to take into account the applicants' former school career including extra-curricular activities, voluntary work, or involvement in student councils or union activities, attitudes when interviewed, their parents' educational experience, and the old-boys network. The majority of Japanese disapprove of taking these multifarious factors seriously into account in assessing applicants.

The basic approach of the Japanese is to seek to avoid competition between classmates or fellow students so as to secure harmony within the group, to emphasize that learning is based on effort and that there is little difference between students in terms of inherent ability, and to pass judgements as fairly and objectively as possible in the selection of applicants. The implementation of this approach is believed to have not only moral significance but to bring social benefits as well. Therefore, the Japanese entrance examination system possesses some merits, although they do not redeem the accompanying failings that are so often mentioned.

Another distinction of Japanese selective admission to post-compulsory education is that a great number of applicants participate in a race which is integrated and open. This accessibility has ironically stimulated the entrance examination system to become a social problem and one of the great concerns among the people. The Bar examination, which is more competitive and sets more difficult papers, has not become a major social issue. That is because only a limited number of students and people take the examination.

Moreover, university entrance examinations are regional events in the United States, while they are nation-wide events in Japan. For admission to Japanese universities, students who are finishing or have already finished secondary school can apply from all over the country. Therefore, the press never fails to report on this sensational event, and particular universities whose names appear in print have come to have popular appeal. The way in which the Japanese mass-media focuses on the topic of the entrance examinations is a puzzle to the press in the West. The mass-media have thus created the illusion that entrance examinations are the central issue in Japanese education. This, however, is a vicious circle in that it promotes public interest in the topic and intensifies the competition (Lynn, 1988:27-30).

Ⅷ. Autonomous School Management

In Japanese schools, important decisions are taken at staff meetings, and the schools are administered in accordance with the decisions reached. Furthermore, the staff have a strong tendency to resist interference from outsiders.

As stated in the introduction to the present paper, there is very little difference among countries in the structure and machinery of the modern school system. In particular, the Japanese education system strongly

resembles educational systems of other advanced countries, because Japan has been learning from them for more than a hundred years, and today it has almost caught up with them with respect to social and economic background.

In general, under a modern educational system, local governments establish public schools according to the criteria laid down by the central or state government, and give their respective local education boards jurisdiction over these schools. The school staff includes a principal, a vice-principal, teachers and supporting workers. These staff members are allocated duties in accordance with the subjects they teach or the grades they are in charge of, and hold meetings when their responsibilities need to be adjusted.

Japan has much in common with other advanced countries and the NIES concerning the mechanism of educational governance. Nevertheless, there are some differences between Japan and other countries as regards the lines of interaction between schools and their competent authorities, the intercommunication between the principal and the teachers within school, the interrelationships among the staff members, the decision-making process at staff meetings, and the way of negotiation with outsiders.

Japanese schools conform to Japanese government offices and private enterprises in having a particular way of thinking with respect to the management of their affairs or the interrelationships among the staff members. In Japan, for example, decision-making with regard to school management is carried out with the mutual consent of the teaching and non-teaching staff members, whereas overseas school staff usually work under the direction of administrators. Their schools also do not hold staff meetings as often as Japanese schools do.

This can be explained in part by the fact that a classroom generally acts as a unit in educational activities in the West, whereas in Japan it is the whole school that is so considered. Nevertheless, the difference between them has not resulted from the authority of law, but from cultural factors. Since ancient times, organizations in Japan have been inclined to invite almost all insiders to engage in management and to heed their various opinions (Nakamura:Japanese version, 1988:241-244).

The staff meeting is in most cases the authorized channel for making decisions at elementary or secondary school level, though the principal is formally empowered by law to manage his school. At universities, where decision-making is performed by the faculties, only full professors are legally empowered to sit on the faculty board, but associate and assistant professors or lecturers regularly join the faculty meetings. In some cases, research assistants and even representatives of students as well as non-teaching staff union are entitled to have a voice there. In addition, even non-teaching staff and students cast votes in the election for rectors or deans. These customs are practiced without regulation by law.

Furthermore, there is virtual autonomy in the administration of schools with little interference from education boards or local communities. Although every public elementary and secondary school has a parent-teacher association which helps to develop friendly relation, there is no advisory council of parents to express their wishes and opinions concerning the running of the schools. The British school governor has no counterpart in Japanese schools, although it does in French, German and American schools.

During the early postwar period, the Occupation government attempted to introduce some indigenous systems into Japan so that the local population could participate in the management of schools. Japanese educators showed strong resistance to these systems. For example, election by popular vote for education board members took place based on the model of the American school boards, but the aim of elected laymen control was defeated very shortly after the Occupation period. As a result, board members came to be appointed by mayors or governors.

The Occupation Forces also intended to have a board of regents to manage the Japanese national public universities in the same manner as the American board of regents. However, the Bill concerning University Administration and Management fell through and a board of regents has not been organized yet. The University of Tsukuba and some other so-called 'new universities' which have 'reformed internal organization' appoint a number of intellectuals to a board of counselors in order to invite their opinions on university management, but they are not very influential.

Thus, a scheme for layman control has hardly ever worked well in Japan. This is mainly because the idea of acting on the advice of outsiders does not appeal to people throughout society. In private enterprises, the management value employees' opinions more highly and share-holders' advice more lightly in comparison with Western management.

According to the provisions of the Commercial Code, Japanese shareholders are conferred with more extensive powers than their Western counterparts. Most managing directors in Japanese companies, however, are elected from among the employees, and consequently, they tend to consider the benefits of employees more favorably than those of share-holders (Clark, 1979:99-101). The profound sense of solidarity among people who share everyday life in a group does not allow outsiders to control their affairs.

Conclusion

Apart from further discussion on the eight distinctive features of Japanese education cited in this paper, we should also bear in mind that Japan is likely to experience certain difficulties in correcting the defects and weaknesses of its education system or in adopting the virtues of foreign education systems.

For one thing, the advantages and disadvantages of Japanese education are sometimes two sides of the same coin. Accordingly, a particular feature produces both good and harmful effects at the same time.

As an example, parents' readiness to give their children a good education at any expense deserves praise, but it has also intensified competition among pupils and students, and led to the much-criticized prosperity of the 'examination industry'. Moreover, although it is generally conceded that intensive preparation for examinations causes undue stress to students, it also develops such positive habits as careful work, self-discipline, diligence and endurance. It is also claimed that egalitarianism and emphasis on group consciousness in education contribute to uniformly high student achievement while at the same time, they hamper the development of individuality and creativity. In the same way, the centralized administration and budgeting of the school system are considered helpful in maintaining a high national

standard of education with few differences in conditions among districts, whereas they are also considered a main cause of monotony in Japanese education.

Furthermore, Japanese schools share some characteristics with other Japanese institutions. For example, Japanese pupils are promoted each year to the next grade almost regardless of achievement, just as company or government employees are promoted mainly through seniority. Basically, most staff members who have joined the office at the same time with equal qualifications get a rise at the same time. Although students must exert themselves to gain admission to reputable universities, once they are admitted they are almost certain to graduate. This situation is similar to what is called 'lifelong employment', which is guaranteed to successful applicants to large companies.

The procedure for decision-making is another example. In Japanese companies and government offices, a decision or action seldom takes place without ringi, the system of circulating an intra-office memorandum to obtain the approval of all employees concerned. In Japanese schools, any important decision takes place at faculty meetings in which all staff members usually participate. Thus, decision-making is done through a bottom-up process instead of the top-down process characteristic of Western countries. These similarities between schools and other organizations in Japan imply that the ideology of egalitarianism or group consciousness, which supports ringi, is predominant in Japanese society.

In addition, in attempting to import the strengths of overseas educational systems, some foreign institutions and views have successfully taken root in Japanese soil, but some others have not. The former include a pragmatic approach to education, equality-oriented school education, the single-track school system, teacher-centered classroom instruction, and autonomous school management by the staff. Examples of the latter include a meritocracy-oriented school education (although meritocracy has barely been maintained through the entrance examinations), a dual school structure, individualized instruction, and inclusion of outsiders' opinions in internal school management. As a rule, foreign practices which are in harmony with Japanese culture, values or ideas have been more successful in Japan than in their countries of origin, whereas those which are not in harmony have not been successful at all.

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